

IAN Pearson's 38th goal of the season kept Wycombe Wanderers in line for the Rothmans Isthmian League title on Saturday. But the Blues were far from convincing winners against Leytonstone at Loakes Park.

With leaders Enfield beating Hitchin at home, the situation at the top stays the same with the Middlesex club six points clear while Wanderers have two games (a possible six points) in hand. Dagenham are a further six points adrift but also have two games in hand on Wycombe and four on Enfield.

In the end, it could be goal difference that decides the championship and Wycombe's is the best at the moment. On Saturday they had a great chance to improve it considerably against an injury-struck Leytonstone side who are in mid-table.

Once again, however, I have to report on a series of

by STUART EARP Wycombe Wanderers 1, Leytonstone 0

missed scoring opportunities which against a better side than Leytonstone, could have proved decisive. If the Blues are to clinch the title this season, they must start hitting the target more regularly. They are lucky to have a player who has a marvellous scoring touch in Pearson but too much responsibility is placed on his shoulders.

One has only to look at the list of goalscorers to see the problem. While Pearson has 38, Howard Kettleborough has 16 and only Mick Holifield joins them in double figures. Dylan Evans has only seven this season and it is up to Pearson's front running team-mates to start putting the ball away.

At times on Saturday, Wanderers looked real championship material. But on other occasions their passing and control was extremely poor with the midfield men taking much of the blame. Wycombe's success in the past has been founded on the ability to combine and finish at speed but they have yet to achieve this consistently.

Again the Blues owe their defence a great deal for it was the back four who withstood a spirited challenge from the East Enders in the second half.

On a hard, dry pitch, Wycombe fielded the side that won at Hitchin last week with Peter Spittle continuing in place of the injured John Maskell. Keith Mead's leg injury had recovered in time.

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The chances started coming after 10 minutes when Pearson sent over a lovely cross to the far post where Evans headed down but Kettleborough failed to get full power behind his shot.

Mick Holifield, who enjoyed another fine game, headed just wide and Pearson suffered the same fate soon afterwards as Wanderers stamped a firm grip on the game. Given time and space, Wycombe looked likely to run riot once they hit the elusive early goal. Spittle's long goalkicks and Kettleborough's aerial ability caused the Stones back four real headaches.

But the flow of the game was

constantly interrupted by the whistle of referee Morell who should have booked Steve King for a dangerously high tackle on Mead shortly before half time. Paul Birdseye avenged the offence later and he too was fortunate to avoid a booking. The pattern continued after the break with the referee bringing cries of derision from the crowd with several peculiar decisions.

Not that Wanderers could heap all the blame on Mr Morell. Their passing was badly timed and ill directed and apart from Holifield's lightning bursts from midfield, they looked short of ideas up front. A change of tactics from their 17 corners might have helped, too.

West Indian Paul Powell had a great chance to put the visitors ahead after only a minute of the new half when he misused the ball over the top, but two minutes later John Priestley produced the shot of the match with a rising drive from nearly 30 yards. It looked a spectacular goal but John Jacobs flung himself high and wide to push the ball away.

A thrilling Holifield run was halted by John Clarke's body check that again went unpunished, but in the 53rd minute Pearson broke through for the only goal of the game. Evans went in bravely to block an attempted clearance inside the Leytonstone box and the ball fell

nically into the path of Pearson. He took the ball on and despite the narrow angle, thumped in a shot that was too powerful for Jacobs to stop although he got a touch to the ball.

Wanderers faded disappointingly after the goal and their build-ups were ruined by poor passing. Pearson, although dangerous in the box, was frequently caught in possession and Evans once missed from three yards when he had to turn sharply.

Pearson forced a full length save from Jacobs but Leytonstone began to cause a few frowns on the face of the home fans in the closing stages with one or two dangerous attacks. The Blues were lucky to escape in the 79th minute when Holifield handled inside the area but Mr Morell insisted the offence took place outside the box.

The Leytonstone revival was firmly dealt with by Alan Phillips and Co. and Wycombe finished in command forcing three successive corners in the last five minutes.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies; G. Mackenzie, J. Priestley, M. Holifield; I. Pearson, H. Kettleborough (sub. S. Hill, 77 mins), D. Evans.

LEYTONSTONE: J. Jacobs; L. Tilley, J. Clarke, K. Elley, J. Smith; P. Fishenden, S. Lucas, P. Powell; J. Wilsonham, J. Brookes (sub. J. Morgan, 64 mins), S. King.

Referee: J. Morell (Taddington).

Half-time: 0-0. **Goalscorer:** Wycombe — Pearson (53).

Attendance: 1,300.